

FOUNTAIN
OF YOUTH

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La Fuente de la Vida

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

BY

SERAFÍN & JOAQUÍN
ÁLVAREZ-QUINTERO

Translated by

SAMUEL N. BAKER



STEWART KIDD

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EDITED BY

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CINCINNATI, U. S. A.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

(LA FLOR DE LA VIDA)

A Poetic Drama in Three Acts

By

SERAFÍN & JOAQUÍN ÁLVAREZ-QUINTERO

Translated by
SAMUEL N. BAKER



CINCINNATI
STEWART KIDD COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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MAIN

CHARACTERS:

AUREA, *daughter of the Duke and Duchess of La
Fontana*

CELLINI, *an innkeeper's son*

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

ACT ONE

SCENE:

A shady spot in the woods near Solar de la Montaña, a small but noble town in northern Spain. In the background through the trees can be distinguished the sea, on which the afternoon sun is reflected. From the right foreground to the left background a small stream flows over some great rocks which form natural seats. The action takes place at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the month of May. Behind the scenes Aurea can be heard singing the following song as she approaches.

TIME:

Afternoon.

AUREA (*singing*)

A kind old man
Amidst the crowd
Sang thus to-day:
“Through paths of thorns and flowers,
Through vales of smiles and tears I pass.
The best I cull along the road
And bring to you,
An offering on my way;
For the child a promise,
For the lass a love,
For the man a benediction,
For those beyond a rose.”

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(*Aurea comes out upon the stage. She is the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of La Fontana, a family of noble lineage, rich land-owners, who, notwithstanding the purity of their escutcheon and the abundance of their wealth, possess in their daughter alone a treasure which is worth more than all their other possessions. Charming, graceful, effervescent, romantic, bubbling over with merriment, spontaneous, ingenuous, and full of good-natured fun; of ready wit, of singular delicacy of feeling; and charmingly self-satisfied: such is Aurea. She is carrying a spray of wild flowers.*)

AUREA

How glad I am some kind old man has sung that song. (*Calling out and looking into the wings at the right.*) Don Leandro! Don Leandro, for Heaven's sake, leave those old ants and come and talk with me. Am I not as entertaining as the whole ant-hill? Come, come. He does not answer, he does not even hear me. Truly, he is impossible. (*Resuming her song.*)

“For the child a promise,
For the lass a love.”

Don Leandro, come and see the animal that has come out to look at me, and perhaps to eat me up. Useless! When he is examining an ant, the heavens might fall and he would never notice it. (*Finishing her song.*)

“For the man a benediction,
For those beyond a rose.”

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I would rather have Father Gonzalito accompany me on my walks. To be sure, he would keep reciting to me his Latin Ode to Carlos IV, but then he also listens respectfully to what I have to say, and heaven knows that is not little. Today I feel like talking; I must talk. But with whom? (*Calling out.*) Echo! Echo! Alas, she cannot talk with me. She can only repeat what I call out to her. If from these rocks should spring some elf as in the tales of olden days, how I should love to talk with him! But now I wait in vain. He does not come. (*Looking at her reflection in the pool.*) Ah, good! It seems as if I myself were in the pool—the sky and I. How lovely! There, in the depths, the sky; and up above, the sky; and I myself between the two. My very self, my feet, my skirt, my waist, my throat, my arms, my hands, my hair, my face. (*To the image in the water.*) You naughty girl! (*Laughingly.*) If the good priest should hear me now he would explain that praise of self is vanity, and vanity a sin. He cannot hear me now, and yet fain would I that he could, and I would talk with him, if he would only listen; and the joy of having someone to talk with would offset the bitterness of that which he might have to say. But I find neither that holy man, nor the tiny elf, nor even a little song bird to divert me, and I can only hear the distant murmur of the sea. (*Behind the scenes Cellini can be heard speaking.*)

CELLINI

Who is singing yonder?

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AUREA

Who asks?

CELLINI

Who is singing there?

AUREA

Whence do you call? What voice is that? Can it be some genie of these rocks? I see no one. (*Looking well into the wings.*) Ah, yonder I see a form emerge. 'Tis no elf but welcome whosoe'er he be, if he can talk. How happened it that Ramon, the forest ranger, let him pass the gate? He could not have come in that way, but I am glad to find him here. Don Leandro, continue to enjoy your ants. Your interest in them just suits me now. How slowly moves the apparition, though. A youth, and comely, too. (*She begins to tidy herself and goes over to inspect her reflection in the pool, waiting in silence until the form draws near. Cellini enters. He is a tall, well-built youth, simply clad. His eyes are fixed vacantly on space in front of him. He is leaning on a stick made from a branch stripped of its leaves.*)

CELLINI

Is there someone here?

AUREA

Yes.

CELLINI

Who?

AUREA

I.

CELLINI

A woman, I should say.

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AUREA

Can you not see me?

CELLINI

No.

AUREA

Are you, then, blind?

CELLINI

Yes, I am blind, sad to relate.

AUREA (*drawing near*)

I am sorry. You do not see me? You cannot see me? (*She says this with all the sadness of one who believes that not to see her beauty is the greatest misfortune in the world.*)

CELLINI

In the network of this wood I lost my way and I wish to find again the highway leading to the town, where I am due before sunset. Am I far away?

AUREA

No, very near.

CELLINI

Where am I then?

AUREA

You are in the grounds of the Duke of La Fontana.

CELLINI

Ah, then, you are Mariuca, the daughter of the guardian of the grounds.

AUREA

You know her?

CELLINI

No, but I have heard my friends speak much of her.

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AUREA (*repressing a laugh*)

Well, then, I am Mariuca.

CELLINI

I am fortunate indeed! Will you direct me to the highroad, Mariuca?

AUREA

Willingly. Come, give me your hand.

(*Cellini reaches out his hand towards her, but on touching Aurea's drops it, trembling.*)

CELLINI

Ah, no, you are deceiving me. You are not Mariuca.

AUREA

Why do you say that?

CELLINI

Because your hand is not that of a peasant.

AUREA

I am Mariuca, only my father dreams of marrying me one day to a noble lord and does not wish to have me till the ground. He wishes me to lead the life of one worthy to merit this suitor when he comes.

CELLINI

But—?

AUREA

Do you still doubt me?

CELLINI

No, when you explain it thus. Since you are, then, so kind, direct me to the path.

AUREA

You can soon be on the highway, but are you in great haste?

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CELLINI

Yes. I am unwilling to alarm my parents, who grow anxious if I do not return before night falls.

AUREA

But night is still a long way off.

CELLINI

A long way off?

AUREA

Yes, but for you 'tis always night, I fear.

CELLINI

Always.

AUREA

Sit down and rest yourself a moment. I wish to talk with you.

CELLINI

And I with you, Mariuca. Where shall I sit?

AUREA

Here, on these rocks. Come, here.

CELLINI (*after sitting down*)

May God reward you for your kindness and your company.

AUREA

Now it is your turn to talk. Were you born blind?

CELLINI

No, I lost my eyesight at the age of five.

AUREA

Then—?

CELLINI

Then I know what form and color are. I know that the sky is blue; that the stars are bright; that the fields are green; and that the roses are like the hand you offered me just now.

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AUREA

So my hand recalls the roses to you. (*Gaily.*)
That compliment I owe to you alone. No one
who has seen my hand has ever found that
✧ simile before.

CELLINI

Tell me, Mariuca, are you as lovely as they say
you are?

AUREA

I do not know. I do not hear what they say;
but I believe I am not ugly enough to frighten
away the youths.

CELLINI

But what does your mirror tell you when you
look squarely into it?

AUREA

It tells me—well, it tells me to consult another
one to see how I look in profile. (*They laugh.*)
But more often than in a glass am I accustomed
to see myself reflected in this pool at whose edge
we are now seated.

CELLINI

And does the pool tell you things too?

AUREA

Yes.

CELLINI

And what does it have to say?

AUREA

Of my hands just what you have said. It seems
the pool is also blind.

CELLINI

What are your eyes like, Mariuca?

AUREA

They are black.

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CELLINI

Black, the loveliest kind of all.

AUREA

How can you know? What child of five can note the beauty in another's eyes?

CELLINI

My mother's eyes were black.

AUREA

What is the name you bear?

CELLINI

Cellini.

AUREA

Cellini? Are you the famous Cellini, the mad-cap son of the innkeeper?

CELLINI

No, the famous one, as you call him, is my brother Berto.

AUREA

Berto?

CELLINI

Yes, Berto.

AUREA

They tell strange tales of him.

CELLINI

And there are more that could be told.

AUREA

They say that one day, dressed like a priest, he went and preached in a little town where he caused a tremendous stir. Is that merely rumor?

CELLINI

No, it is true. When the authorities found out the fraud he'd practiced, they attempted to put him into jail; but the sermon he had preached

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on love had so delighted the youths and maidens of the town that they not only prevented the plan from being executed, but they tendered him a banquet and serenaded him as well.

AUREA (*laughing*)

What fun!

CELLINI

He has committed a thousand follies. He is mad about impersonating. He says he is not satisfied with being only one man.

AUREA

Then what does he wish?

CELLINI

He wants to play the part of twenty men. He bewails this limitation; and explains that with his mind he can be in a thousand different places, and with his body in but one. And that exasperates him.

AUREA

He certainly is mad,—a man who desires to have twenty personalities. Has he a sweetheart, this brother of yours?

CELLINI

Why do you ask?

AUREA

Because if she is jealous, poor thing, with her lover in twenty different places, and she can only account for him in one,—poor girl!

CELLINI

Such are his fancies and his whims! From childhood he was ever such a dreamer and trickster. My parents tried to educate him well, and he lent himself quite willingly to their intent, devouring every book that fell into his hands:

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history, geography, travel, inventions, poetry. Since I cannot read because of my infirmity, he has read me quantities of novels and diverting tales; and sometimes, when the plot the author gives does not please his mood or fit the plot he has himself conceived, he changes it and reads it off to me as if 'twere really written so. Some days ago, while reading me the "Lovers of Teruel," which I already knew, he ended it by marrying off the lovers and making them live happily ever after; and I remained dumbfounded when he finished thus.

AUREA

What a character!

CELLINI

You are here alone, Mariuca?

AUREA

No.

CELLINI

Who is with you?

AUREA

Yonder roams my brother, Don Luis' tutor, who is supposed to be in charge of me, but he is watching his pet ants instead. He is going to compile a great work on ants, you know—their ways in winter and in summer; their battles, and even their domestic disagreements, I believe. When he sees an ant which appears in any way peculiar, if it has a larger head than one he saw the day before, he will follow it to the ends of the earth. He believes that ants are as intelligent as men, and he threatens me by saying that they will tell him all the peccadillos which I commit behind his back. For my

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part, Cellini, I think he is more completely mad than your brother Berto. Why do you laugh?

CELLINI

I am thinking of the rare education which Ramon, the guardian of these grounds, is providing for his children.

AUREA (*catching his meaning*)

Oh!

CELLINI

He is rearing you to be the wife of a nobleman, and he provides a tutor for your older brother, Don Luis. Yes, Doña Mariuca, Don Ramon, the forest guard, is an unusual man.

AUREA (*laughingly*)

I cannot tell you lies. I gave myself away too soon. You asked if I were Mariuca, and to inspire you with confidence I answered, yes. Now I crave your pardon for the deception; but since you are used to those of your own brother, mine will seem innocent, I hope.

CELLINI

Of course, I pardon you. But tell me, since you are not Mariuca, who are you, then?

AUREA

The truth is I am Aurea.

CELLINI (*rising and removing his hat respectfully*)

Aurea, the daughter of the Duke of La Fontana?

AUREA

Her very self. Sit down again, you silly youth.

CELLINI

A thousand pardons, but I could never have suspected that.

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AUREA

Pardon for what? Sit down, Cellini. Let us continue as before.

CELLINI

No, no, Señorita Aurea. I am afraid of incurring the displeasure of—

AUREA

Of whom? Of Don Leandro? Don Leandro is not concerned about you, nor about me either. His ant-hill is absorbing him completely. (*Turning towards the right wing.*) I am not even sure where he is now. But wait, I will find out. (*She takes a few steps and appears to be trying to discover the tutor.*)

CELLINI

Isn't the tutor to be seen, Señorita?

AUREA

Ah, there he is! Only at present he is on all fours. Ha, ha, ha! If you could see him now, Cellini, you would laugh, too. But come, sit down again.

CELLINI

I cannot sit down, Señorita Aurea. A great confusion overwhelms me when I realize in whose presence I find myself—Aurea, the daughter of the Duke of La Fontana! In all Solar de la Montaña, in all the world, in fact, there is no tongue but sings her beauty's praise, a beauty not to be compared with that of any other mortal. As for me, I vow that if I now rejoice at having had my sight in childhood 'tis because, having once seen, I can now picture you in my mind's eye, as beautiful as everyone describes you, a great bright light amidst the

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shadows where I dwell. Aurea, are you still there?

AUREA

I am still here, Cellini. Continue.

CELLINI

Why should I?

AUREA

Because I love to hear you. All the radiance which is wanting to your eyes your words possess instead.

CELLINI

Yes?

AUREA

Yes, I have never heard such inspired, joyful words. Go on. Go on.

CELLINI

You wish me to continue?

AUREA

I wish you to continue, and to call me Aurea as you called me Mariuca before.

CELLINI

Oh, no, not that.

AUREA

Why not? I command you to.

CELLINI

As a command, then, I obey. I will serve you so, or in any other way you ask.

AUREA

Am I so much to you?

CELLINI

All that and more. Every mortal carries in his heart a dream, perhaps a reflection of the divine mystery into which none of us can really ever penetrate, a vague light of the spirit whose

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gleam affords us happy hours. Well, that ideal assumes for me the beauty of your being, because I can conceive nothing more glorious or more inspiring. Do you understand now, Aurea, all that you mean to me?

AUREA

How fortunate I am, Cellini! No one ever said such things to me before. Where and by what art have you learned them? Who taught those words to you? What magic have you put therein that they affect me so? Why do I tremble? I confess to you, Cellini, that it seems as if a bird were fluttering in my heart. How sad it is that you cannot see!

CELLINI

Does that really cause you suffering?

AUREA

Yes, that makes me suffer bitterly. I am conscious of a pain, sharp, infinite, and new; a suffering which seems to be of my very soul. Why, if all others see me, can you not see me, too?

CELLINI

Aurea, you must not suffer because of me. I do see you.

AUREA (*absently*)

What are you saying?

CELLINI

I am not blind, Aurea; and if I were, to feel that you were weeping because of that, my eyes would see with a new light. I do see you, Aurea, I do see you.

AUREA

You see me! Oh—(*She draws away from him.*)

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CELLINI

Don't cry out. Don't be afraid.

AUREA

I won't cry out—but as to being frightened—well, what miracle or what farce is this? Who are you, anyway?

CELLINI

Cellini, the madcap!

AUREA

The madcap!

CELLINI

Yes. Cellini, the blind man, is but one more fiction of Cellini, the madcap.

AUREA

And what brings you here? Why did you come?

CELLINI

I came to talk with you, Aurea. I feigned blindness because a blind man inspires pity. One is always willing to listen to a blind man and to guide him.

AUREA

What have you, then, to say to me?

CELLINI

I have so much, I could never tell you all.

AUREA

Never?

CELLINI

Never. And yet I have only these few moments and this chance meeting.

AUREA

What have you, then, to say?

CELLINI

That I do not know; everything and nothing.

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Everything because of what I feel, and nothing because of what I have to hope.

AUREA

Cellini, I do not understand what there is about you, what charm envelops all your words that I should listen to you all disconcerted and confused. Yet, in spite of all, the more I hear from you the more you make me want to hear. I felt this afternoon, before you came, a great desire to talk with whomsoe'er might come—with the trees, the sky, the rivulet, the sea. And then you came, and you have told me all these things, and still I merely want to listen. Cellini, can you really be Cellini or are you only deceiving me again?

CELLINI

No. I am Berto Cellini, Aurea. Oh, that I were the son of some great lord, or that you were Mariuca.

AUREA

Why? Is it not more delightful to be enjoying thus each other's confidence? You interest me greatly just as Cellini. How I have wanted to know that fellow! Oh, if you were the son of some great lord, you would not now be here within these grounds and much less alone with me. We would be in the great hall at home, both ill at ease, watching our elders playing chess. The monks would be sipping chocolate and listening to my father extolling for the hundredth time the prowess of his ancestors. My mother would be praising the good nuns in whose convent I grew up and who taught me first to read and write and then infused in me

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the fear of God and man. On the other hand, Cellini, being yourself, without fear you penetrate where no one is allowed to enter. You brave the guard, and, feigning blindness, come to seek my sympathy and talk to me in a new tongue. You fill my solitude with romance. Oh, this one afternoon I would not want to be Mariuca—because—because you are Cellini.

CELLINI

Oh, fortunate Cellini, to be thus received by you. Since then we have only this afternoon, Aurea, let us talk.

AUREA

Only this one afternoon?

CELLINI

And that as by a miracle; for tomorrow, Aurea, in the tutor's place the priest might come, the guard might be on duty, and I might not get in. If you should tell the Duke, your father, that you would like to talk again with the son of Rosana the innkeeper, with the penniless son of Cellini the musician, who plays the organ in Santa Marina, he would surely think you were beside yourself and have you guarded more carefully than now. You were born to an exalted station, and I to one of low degree. To them it makes no difference that I feel my spirit winged to scale the clouds; such wings they cannot see. I do not wish to change your life, to interrupt the steady beatings of your heart, for soon they say from fair Seville will come the suitor whom your parents have selected from among their peers. We only have this afternoon, Aurea.

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AUREA

Have you known me long, Cellini?

CELLINI

Yes, since I was a child.

AUREA

Since a child?

CELLINI

The day of the Pilgrimage of La Fontana your parents dressed you as a fisher-girl, just as the peasants do, and brought you to the shrine where the people showed you even more homage than they did the Virgin. Then you seemed to us poor boys a gift from heaven, some mysterious creature of divine origin who fascinated us by your mere presence. One of those spell-bound little boys was I.

AUREA

You? I don't remember it.

CELLINI

The last time your parents brought you to the shrine I had gathered from the wayside fields the fairest flowers which grew and made a garland out of them for you. As you passed by, your parents stopped their carriage long enough to lift me in and place me at your side. And I, quite bold till then, sat dazed to find myself so near you. I dared not talk nor even smile, for hardly I could breathe. I only gazed at you. And at the shrine they told me I might kiss you.

AUREA

And did you do so?

CELLINI

Yes.

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AUREA

I don't remember it at all.

CELLINI

With my childish lips I kissed your cheek. With all the fervor of a devotee, I kissed the hem of your dress. Oh, what a day that was for me! That day it seemed as if I had been touched by some divine grace which ever since has added to my soul the wings with which I soar. And that same night I could not sleep, I was so feverish and so restless. My mother, who watched at my bedside, has told me how I tossed and raved. I begged to be a man, a soldier, a hero, or a king!

AUREA

Go on, Cellini. Your story pleases me as no other tale has ever done.

CELLINI

Then I will tell you now what is the most important thing for me to say. Tomorrow I leave these well-known haunts, these fields so green, these blue mountains, where my youth has slipped so smoothly by. My life has been all to no purpose here. I am going now to wander through the world with a great desire to know it better. But in my boyish heart you sowed the seed of this great love which brings me here to you today.

AUREA

Did you say love?

CELLINI

Yes, Aurea, it is love,—mad for being mine, but beautiful for being thus inspired by you. 'Tis a pure but hopeless passion. Your life will

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naturally belong to some other man who perhaps will merit you, or to one who may be far from being worthy; but when I leave Solar de la Montaña I do not want to take this secret with me. The confession which I make to you is doubtless as childish and harmless as the kiss I gave you at the shrine. But why should I depart without confessing it? Even if it means to you no more than the idle tale of some old woman spinning by the fireside, why should you be ignorant of the fact that you have been and still remain the inspiration of my life? Know that I have always adored you silently; that the thought of you has filled every happy hour of my youth; and that a sight of you caught quite by chance has sometimes meant the radiance of a year for me. Know, too, that a hundred times by night have I encircled those convent walls which sheltered you, and these walls here when you returned; that I have stolen flowers from your garden; that only to have seen your sweet, fair self in this great world do I consider my life beautified and blessed.

AUREA

Go on, Cellini. Go on!

CELLINI

Sh—Sh—

AUREA

What is it?

CELLINI

Silence. Pretend again that I am blind.

AUREA

The tutor?

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CELLINI

Yes.

AUREA (*with frank annoyance*)

Can some ant have told him what was occurring here?

CELLINI (*making his eyes again assume a vacant look*)

Do you say, sister, that straight ahead lies the pathway to the highroad?

AUREA

Yes, very soon you will reach the porter's lodge, and from there they will direct you. (*As if speaking to the tutor.*) It is a poor blind man, Don Leandro, who has lost his way. (*As if replying.*) I'm not to blame. I know there is a signboard, but as he is blind, the poor man could not read it.

CELLINI

Who is speaking, there, in the distance, Señorita?

AUREA

Don't mind him, brother. Come this way, with me. (*She gives him her hand and leads him towards the left.*) Step carefully! Now we must say goodbye.

CELLINI

Forever.

AUREA

Forever?

CELLINI

Yes, fate has so decreed. You were not born for me, nor I for you. But perhaps between our souls there may always be an understanding. Goodbye, Aurea.

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AUREA

Goodbye, Cellini. (*Speaking again to the tutor.*)
Yes, I am coming, Don Leandro; I am coming.
May the blind man go on his way rejoicing, and
may his eyes soon see what most he wants to see.

CELLINI

That which his eyes most wanted to behold
they have just seen. (*He disappears.*)

AUREA

Yes, I am coming, sir. I am coming. (*She goes reluctantly towards the right, still looking after Cellini.*) What a dream! What an adventure! Am I still the same Aurea? Am I the same person that I was before? Will the sun not set tonight as always? What was I doing when this stranger came? Oh, yes. I felt like talking, and I was singing:

“For the child a promise,
For the lass a love,
For the man a benediction,
For those beyond a rose.”

End of Act One

ACT TWO

SCENE:

A small reception room in a summer cottage, near Seville, on the banks of the Guadalquivir. In the background, towards the right, a door; and to the left, a window, through which can be seen a garden bathed in moonlight. Severe but tasteful furnishings. On the white walls there are various pictures and the portrait of a gentleman. A light is burning in the room. The action takes place fifteen years after that of Act One. In the distance can be heard the ringing of a bell at the garden gate announcing the arrival of a visitor. Shortly afterwards Cellini, enveloped in a rich cape, comes upon the stage. His costly trappings offer a striking contrast to the clothes which he wore in Solar de la Montaña.

CELLINI (*after taking a few steps up and down the room, and looking toward the door by which he has just entered*)

No one here—no one in the garden. Thus far the letter has not deceived me. The little bell at the gate tinkled. Not a soul here, but there is a light burning. Now I must wait, although my cape weighs more heavily upon me than the whole adventure. (*He throws his hat and cape upon a chair.*) The night is warm and balmy, just made for an adventure and for love. And love it is which brings me here. Can it be for love that I am summoned? Who knows? But what would my respected father say to this?

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Yonder through the garden's leafy boughs twinkle the lights of fair Seville, a place of legends and of dreams, a land where any kind of madness may be indulged. It was a happy day for me when I came here. (*Walking up and down pensively.*) Duque de Él—Master of Himself! That title fits me well! It cost me little to acquire my blue blood and that high-sounding name. Merely the trouble of inventing it—no more. (*He approaches the light and reads the following letter aloud with great satisfaction.*)

"To the Master of Himself:—Scarce half a league from La Puerta Macarena, at the river's edge, there is a little house known as Jasmine Cottage. Go there tonight promptly at ten o'clock, about a matter which concerns you. If a matter concerning you is not sufficient to arouse your curiosity, come for a matter which concerns me. Go to the garden gate, which will yield to the touch of your hand, causing a little bell to tinkle. No one will be there to meet you."

And it has been just so.

"Continue along the narrow garden path, and proceed fearlessly to the door of the house, which will seem lost in the shrubbery, but this door will also yield to the pressure of your hand. Enter it fearlessly."

Again she writes "fearlessly." My fair one, you do not know the "Master of Himself" if you speak to him of fear.

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"You will find no one, but in a little room you will see a light. Wait for me there."

And here I am. Signed, "A Woman." Here I am waiting; and, lo, she comes. Surely it must be she! (*The bell at the garden gate tinkles again.*) Ah, there she is! (*He awaits eagerly the arrival of the figure, and adds somewhat significantly.*) I might think it was a hoax prepared for me by the people of the town. But it is no hoax, for here she comes—her very self!

(*Aurea, her head and face covered with a mantilla, comes upon the stage.*)

CELLINI

Señora!

(*Aurea is unable to answer, owing to her emotion. With a gesture she bids Cellini wait.*)

CELLINI

What is the matter? I must wait until she grows more calm. You would not think it possible, but her emotion has proved contagious. (*Silence.*) Señora, shall I close the door?

AUREA (*almost inaudibly*)

Yes.

CELLINI

There, 'tis done.

AUREA (*sighing*)

Ah, me!

CELLINI

Oh, divine voice! How could I fail to recognize it? I have heard it only once before; and more than fifteen years have passed since then. But should that voice sigh?

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AUREA (*through her tears*)

Are you the Duque de ÉI?

CELLINI

I am, Señora, but as easily could I become the Great Mogul of India. Thank God, I can always be whosoe'er I wish, Aurea!

AUREA

Not Aurea, now, but the Countess of Miraluz.

CELLINI

The Countess of Miraluz!

AUREA (*casting aside her veil*)

Cellini! (*They clasp hands.*)

CELLINI

I have been waiting for you. I have so often longed to see you. How beautiful you are!

AUREA

Not beautiful.

CELLINI

Not only beautiful, but divine, to me.

AUREA

No, Cellini, no. Tears destroy beauty, and I have shed many bitter tears.

CELLINI

I know.

AUREA

You cannot understand; for when a woman weeps she alone can understand. Can you guess why I have come?

CELLINI

Perhaps. I do not know. I do not wish to think. I only know that I stand here before you and that I bless this unexpected rendezvous.

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AUREA

Ah, this rendezvous, this rendezvous. How long I hesitated before requesting it. But you are you. I know nothing of your life, but I feel that you are still the same. That alone decided me to send for you. Trembling and weeping I came. But you will not let me go away weeping, will you, Cellini?

CELLINI

No, a thousand times, no!

AUREA

What blind confidence I had in that one hope.

CELLINI

Aurea, restrain yourself. Be calm and let us talk. What a moment! It will be the memory of a lifetime for me. And what a night! We thought that we had said goodbye forever in Solar de la Montaña that afternoon when, feigning blindness, I came to find you by the pool. But who can tell whither one goes or where lies the pathway he will follow?

AUREA

Do you remember that afternoon, Cellini?

CELLINI

If I did not remember it I should not be Cellini.
Do you remember it?

AUREA

More than once have I recalled it during these years, Cellini—Duque de Él. And when I saw you in the Park, and they said, "There goes the famous Duque de Él," I stood spellbound when I recognized you.

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CELLINI

Did you recognize me instantly?

AUREA

Instantly. And I understood immediately the mystery which enshrouds you here in Seville. Cellini, Cellini the Madcap, Duque de Él. Your life is always wrapped in mystery. But tell me, what means this title? Duque de Él? Hearing your tale will calm me. Speak, Cellini; speak while I strive to collect myself. Are your parents still alive?

CELLINI

They are.

AUREA

Tell me your story then.

CELLINI

Well, it is thus, Aurea: to be Duke of Something-or-Other falls to the lot of many; but to be Master of Himself—that good fortune has come to me alone, for I do not recall another like it.

AUREA

Nor I. But continue to explain. What of this grandeur, pomp, and luxury in the midst of which you roam about Seville? Are you not rich?

CELLINI

Not a penny do I possess. That would mean I had become a slave to money—that I had sold myself for it, and hence had tarnished the luster of my soul. I am free, for I do not possess a penny! But I am Master of Myself! and there is not in all Seville a banker or a nobleman who

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does not pay me homage, nor any door which does not open to my name, nor any rogue who does not bow to me, nor any beggar who does not bless me on the street, nor any beauty who does not lean from out her chamber window to watch me as I pass by below. For I am the Duque de ÉL.

AUREA

You make me smile, Cellini.

CELLINI

The origin of my title you alone shall know. I used to think I was the maddest, most erratic man alive; but wandering about in this great world, I met in Paris a Scotchman in comparison with whom I proved to be a prodigy of common sense.

AUREA

Good heavens! How does he ever keep his head on his shoulders then!

CELLINI

I would give something just now to know not how he keeps his head there, but if that head is safe.

AUREA

You alarm me, Cellini.

CELLINI

I met Lord Wellington at a sale of some valuable antiques in which, to earn my daily bread, I was then interested. Lord Wellington had all the money that I so despised, and, moreover, he was as whimsical and wayward as a spoiled child or as a pampered invalid. Hence we understood each other perfectly; and after knowing me for three short days, he treated me more like a brother than a friend. But I will sketch

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the story in bold outlines only, for I am anxious to hear what you may have to say.

AUREA

No, no; go on.

CELLINI

Lord Wellington longed to make an extended trip through Spain—a voyage of adventure, art, and love—and he insisted on my joining him. Eight months we spent thus wandering about, discovering treasures and new wonders everywhere; admiring odd corners, landscapes, and lovely women; buying jewels; spending money recklessly; conceiving and executing great deeds in a veritable round of folly. Sometimes we spent the night in a cathedral solely to watch the moonlight filter through the parti-colored glass, or to discover whether, in the solitude of night, the departed kings would leave their sepulchres of stone and would reveal to us some secret of the other world. Often by night we wandered through the dark, deserted streets, scenting some rare adventure which sometimes we ran to earth, and which sometimes eluded us. We have even passed the night in prison.

AUREA

In prison?

CELLINI

Oh, yes, but with fortune as our guide we came out more easily than we went in. Lord Wellington's gold handled by me drew back all bolts for us. When we arrived at Cordoba my companion fell desperately in love with a woman whom he had met by chance at a humble inn, and I thought he had surely lost the few wits he

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possessed. He begged me to go on alone, and in Seville seek out accommodations for us both, assuring me that he would follow soon. But up to now—

AUREA

Up to now?

CELLINI

I have not heard a word from him.

AUREA

Since when?

CELLINI

A month or more ago—the length of time I have been in Seville.

AUREA

But he must be in Cordoba.

CELLINI

Perhaps.

AUREA

And what do you expect to do?

CELLINI

To wait for him.

AUREA

Wait for him? How long?

CELLINI

Until he comes.

AUREA

And if he never comes?

CELLINI

Oh, he will come. In this capacity I first visited Seville, but upon arriving I realized that my luggage appeared far too elegant, and I myself seemed too much of a personage, and that the city seemed far too beautiful for me to continue in my former humble rôle. So I engaged

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the best lodgings I could find, and called myself thenceforth "Duque de Él." I secured a servant of good Sevillian stock, and filled his head with fancies which found good company therein, and that was all. He took good care to betray not one but a thousand confidences of his lord and master. This brought me fame in eight short days.

AUREA

I can well believe it. Some of those deeds came even to my ears. The Duque de Él is going to build himself an Italian palace. The Duque de Él intends to carry off at any price the Virgin of La Servilleta. The Duque de Él has secured several paintings from the walls of the Alcazar. The Duque de Él, like the philanthropist he is, has plans to found a hospital or an asylum. The Duque de Él comes here a fugitive from justice, having killed a noble adversary. He has come, they say, to abduct a famous beauty of Seville. And so the rumors go

CELLINI

Since I have found a title for myself I must now live up to it. All that you have heard of me is pure conjecture, caused by the imagination of the townsfolk. In only one of all these rumors is there a grain of truth,—the acquisition for its weight in gold of a painting of the Conception, by Murillo. I saw it and gave just what they asked me for it, without bargaining. That won for me the friendship of some well-known

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artists whose studios I frequented, and there I met as equals many nobles of the town. I visited their homes and palaces. They all honored me with their hospitality, and here I am laying at your feet my title and my coronet—my treasures—all my grandeur and my fame; and, far more worthy than these tinsel honors and something wholly pure—the aspirations of my heart.

AUREA

Cellini, you are so fortunate to thus create the world in which you wish to live and there to dwell.

CELLINI

I was not born to the only sphere which could have been of any satisfaction to me—one which I might have shared with you. Now when I weary in one sphere I climb to still another.

AUREA

Alas!

CELLINI

Again you sigh. Speak now, Aurea. Tell me your sorrow. Tell me why you sigh—why you have called me here tonight. Why you, yourself, came here? What do you ask—not of the Duque de Élé, but of the adventurer Cellini, of him who as a blind man came to you one afternoon so long ago because he loved you, of him who as a blind man first spoke to you of love and who has since shed many bitter tears because he saw your beauty face to face?

AUREA

Cellini, my friend, if it is true that I have been

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the object of your childish dreams, the idol of your youth, promise me by these sacred memories that you will grant me what I have to ask of you.

CELLINI

Only that?

AUREA

Do you promise?

CELLINI

Can you doubt it?

AUREA

I have come here, then, tonight to this retired spot where with my children I have passed so many happy hours. In shame-faced secrecy with my maids, trembling with anxiety and fear, I have come, betraying my husband and compromising my fair name. When I come thus, Cellini, you can understand that it is for something which to me is dear as life itself.

CELLINI

You are now speaking of your husband.

AUREA

Yes, of him. (*Looking at the portrait, thus calling Cellini's attention to it. He looks at it, too.*)

CELLINI

Oh, I had not noticed him. - My lord, so you are also present at this rendezvous. (*With jesting sarcasm.*) Pardon me if upon arriving I did not salute you as you deserve.

AUREA

Cellini!

CELLINI

Here we two are face to face, and your wife stands yonder. Note her well. Those eyes

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ne'er knew what tears were till they were forced to look on you.

AUREA

Cellini!

CELLINI

Aurea, understand me, and remember that of all the services you may ask of me there is but one which I must needs refuse you.

AUREA

Then it is that one thing which I have come to beg of you.

CELLINI

No, Aurea, not that.

AUREA

Yes, that. I have no other wish. (*Suddenly, hearing a noise in the garden, she starts with terror.*)

CELLINI

What is it?

AUREA

Sh—Sh—

CELLINI

What is it?

AUREA

Don't you hear?

CELLINI

No, I hear nothing.

(*They both listen for a moment without speaking.*)

AUREA

Listen. I hear the sound of bells.

CELLINI

Yes, but to me it sounds more like carriage bells.

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(The lively tinkle of little bells draws nearer all the time.)

AUREA

Good heavens!

CELLINI

What do you fear?

AUREA

I do not know. Why did I ever venture here?

CELLINI

Compose yourself, Aurea.

AUREA

He is coming to surprise me here with you.
Perhaps it is my husband.

CELLINI

But who can have betrayed you thus?

AUREA

I do not know. Just chance or fate, or my own
madness. Go, Cellini, go.

CELLINI

I cannot go. Let us wait together here.

AUREA

Go! Go!

CELLINI

No; I will not leave you here alone. Who knows
what it may mean?

AUREA

Alas, who knows?

*(The carriage, which for a moment appears to be
stopping at the gate, continues on its way, quite
heedless of the alarm it has produced; and the
sound of the bells is lost in the distance.)*

CELLINI

What now?

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AUREA (*giving a cry of alarm*)

Oh—

CELLINI

Why do you start again?

AUREA

The door—I believe there is someone at the door!

CELLINI

For heaven's sake, Aurea, you are beside yourself. Do you not perceive that the sound is already less distinct?

AUREA

Is it less distinct?

CELLINI

Don't your own ears tell you so?

AUREA

Yes. The sound is growing fainter—fainter—fainter—

CELLINI

And there is no one here, as you can see. (*He opens the door wide.*)

AUREA

No one?—No one?

CELLINI

It must have been a carriage full of merry-makers going to some inn nearby.

AUREA

Perhaps.

CELLINI

What is the matter? Calm yourself.

(*From Aurea's breast, torn by conflicting emotions, rises a sigh which finally breaks from her lips, and she begins to sob audibly.*)

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AUREA

Ah, me! Alas!

CELLINI

Aurea, do not weep. Be calm. There is no danger now.

AUREA

The strangeness of this moment, this meeting, has unnerved me. I came as in a dream. It was madness to have come at all. But the favor that I have to ask, Cellini—

CELLINI

What do you wish of me?

AUREA

First, swear to tell me only the truth.

CELLINI

I swear.

AUREA

By what?

CELLINI

By you.

AUREA (*breathless*)

Is it true, then, that last night during a low carouse—?

CELLINI

It is true. You see, I guess to what you tend.

AUREA

Is it, then, true that my name was mentioned there?

CELLINI

It is.

AUREA

Is it, then, true that you struck him in the face? (*Pointing to the portrait.*)

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CELLINI

It is.

AUREA

Is it true that he challenged you to meet him at sunrise tomorrow?

CELLINI

It is all true. As true as my intention is to kill him.

AUREA

No!

CELLINI

Yes!

AUREA

No, Cellini, no! Because they say your stroke is sure. I have come to throw myself between you two.

CELLINI

You stand there weeping: that is why I mean to kill him.

AUREA

And that is why I weep. Be noble now as always, Cellini.

CELLINI

Never did I know what hatred was until I met this man. As if he could ever have been worthy of you!

AUREA

Whether he is worthy or not, Cellini, he is the father of my children. Whether he is worthy or not, I love him.

CELLINI

You love him, Aurea?

AUREA

Yes, I love him. Do not seek the reason of this

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love, for you will never find it. I love him, but my love will never touch his heart; I love him, yet my tears will never move him; I love him, yet within my heart I feel the icy chill of his, while mine consumes for love of him. I love him, but if I seek to cherish him, he flees; if I follow, he eludes me. I call him, and he answers not. I love him, and yet I only have from him the kisses which he gives our children and which I gather hungrily from them. Yet I love him.

CELLINI

Then thrice cursed be this mad love of yours, which should not be. Each lament of yours seems to temper and to whet my blade the more.

AUREA

No.

CELLINI

Yes, Aurea, yes. I hear you speak, although the words that made me strike him are hammering in my brain.

AUREA

What were his words? What did he say?

CELLINI

What did he say? What did he say? Think not that I can repeat his words. No, you would not beg me to spare him if you knew the words which escaped the lips of that man, drunk to be sure, but not more from wine than from the kisses of the lips of her with whom he drank.

AUREA (*groaning with shame, jealousy, and anger*)

Oh!

CELLINI

What now?

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AUREA

Yes, kill him!

CELLINI

I will.

AUREA (*recovering herself*)

No, no, Cellini. What did I say? My jealousy was goading me to madness. When it assails me, like a wild animal, I feel capable of killing him with my own hands. But do not heed what I said just now. Listen to me only when I beg you to be merciful.

CELLINI (*with saddened memories, as if enraged at himself*)

Ah! Palace of the Dukes of La Fontana, why did I respect your rotting walls? Why did I not burn you down and rescue from your flames the treasure which belonged to me? Why did I not seek gold from out the bowels of the earth, and thus become a power? Why did I not destroy your 'scutcheon, that empty symbol of worn stone? Why did I think 'twas not for me, the heart that God had bound to mine with bands stronger than all the half-truths of the world?

AUREA

Cellini, enough, enough. Let us not indulge in mad delirium. Tomorrow all this to us will seem a feverish dream. Now that chance has brought us face to face again, when we say goodbye let the same pure spirit prevail which surrounded us in that garden where you came to find me at Solar de la Montaña. Now it is no longer the jealous wife who pleads with you, but it is the innocent girl who took the hand of the blind man to guide him to the rocks which

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bordered on the stream wherein her beauty was reflected.

CELLINI

Aurea.

AUREA

Nor is it only that girl who begs you to forgive her and go away. It is the child of noble lineage, clad as a fisher-girl, by whose side you drove one day in silence to the shrine, and to whom you gave your flowers and your kiss.

CELLINI

Plead no more, Aurea. I only thought to free you from a torment. Can it be possible that you have been obliged to beg of me? What do you bid me do?

AUREA

To renounce this duel, and to leave Seville. Will you do that for me?

CELLINI

The maiden who used to gaze at her reflection in the pool has only to command.

AUREA

And will you leave tonight?

CELLINI

The little fisher-girl who took my flowers has only to command me.

AUREA (*gratefully*)

Cellini.

CELLINI

You weep again, Aurea?

AUREA

Tears, to be sure, but unlike those you saw just now, which they resemble only outwardly.

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CELLINI

My love! (*He draws near Aurea, and, grasping the hand which she yields him, kisses it fervidly. Then he releases it, and with amusing originality says, facing the portrait:*) Pardon me, my friend, but at least I have a right to that, for in choosing between a fatal sword thrust in your flank and a kiss on your wife's hand, I believe I am choosing the lesser of two evils for you. (*Aurea smiles.*) You smile at my odd notions.

AUREA

I smile, but through my tears. I bless your kindness and your generosity, oh, Duque de Él.

CELLINI

Duque de Él I was. I die without the touch of any sword, but I die worthy of my name, for a beautiful woman has vanquished my intention. I will leave Seville before the sun is up. I promise that. No one shall think my flight is due to fear or cowardice, for they all know well who I am. Some nights ago, when I dared enter alone the so-called Haunted House, the terror and dismay of all Seville, I routed all the ghosts with but the flat of my sword. Those who know will say 'tis not because of fear that I have disappeared. And, by Heavens, I will enshroud my disappearance in such unfathomable mystery that more than as a man of flesh and blood will they remember the Duque de Él as the dauntless spirit of some legend.

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AUREA

Spirit of a legend—you have ever been that in my life: a legend full of love and magnanimity. Farewell, Cellini.

CELLINI

Are you going now, Aurea?

AUREA

Too long already have I lingered. Farewell. This exaltation of the soul which you alone inspire in me will compensate for all that I have not. Farewell.

CELLINI

Shall I accompany you?

AUREA

No. After I leave, you will go out as you came in. No one must see you.

CELLINI

And shall we, then, not meet again some day?

AUREA

Once we said goodbye forever in my father's garden, and 'twas not forever. My wish would be to meet again some day.

CELLINI

It will, perhaps, occur without our seeking it, as now, for I am sure that if ever in your life should come a moment when you called out for me, without a single spoken word, my very footsteps would guide me to your side unconsciously.

AUREA

Farewell until that time.

CELLINI

Until we meet again—goodbye.

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AUREA

Goodbye, Cellini.

CELLINI

Goodbye.

(They take each other's hands for a moment, and then she goes out. Long pause. Cellini watches her disappear. Then, facing the portrait again, exclaims, arrogantly:)

CELLINI

Between you two I stand forever, and bear in mind that I am no longer the Duque de Élé, but Berto Cellini; that your wife may not be the first woman to whom I have broken my word, and that I can change my mind as quickly as the wind; that my hand is even now itching to hold a sword; that there are still many hours before the dawn.—Good-night. *(He puts on his hat, throws his cape over his shoulders, and walks resolutely out as the curtain falls.)*

End of Act Two

ACT THREE

SCENE

Hall in the luxurious mansion of the Count de la Selva in Madrid. At the right, the main entrance; at the left, a huge fireplace. In the background, a window through which can be seen a picturesque garden. In a corner, the lower part of the staircase leading to the upper rooms of the house. It is a clear night in the month of January. Thirty years have elapsed since Act Two.

Behind the wings, at the left, can be heard the plaintive wail of a street musician's violin. Upon nearing the house the playing suddenly ceases. Soon an old man with his violin under his arm passes through the garden from left to right toward the door of the hall, where he appears a few moments later. It is Berto Cellini. His hair and beard are carefully brushed, but he is clad very simply. No one would say that such simple garments could ever clothe the person of him who thirty years ago was known as "Duque de ÉL."

CELLINI

"Have him come in and wait," the message ran. Well, here I am. The night is fine but sharp, a perfect winter's eve. My old body glows before the friendly warmth of this great fireside. (*Approaching the fireplace, and putting down his hat and violin, and rubbing his hands together.*) Ah! what can these people want of me, and who can they be? From their surround-

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

ings, they must be both rich and noble. We shall see. (*A pause. After warning himself a bit, he picks up his hat and violin again.*) My violin. Surely, Cellini, your good fortune never deserts you!

(*At this moment a venerable dowager is seen descending the stairway. It is Aurea. Thirty years have set their stamp on her beauty. The sweet, smiling expression is intensified as she catches sight of the violinist.*)

AUREA

Good evening!

CELLINI

Good evening, Señora.

AUREA

I hope you will be kind enough to pardon my boldness.

CELLINI

Boldness?

AUREA

In requesting you to come in and thus detaining you.

CELLINI

I welcome the occurrence. I am delighted, far from having anything to forgive. Between the penetrating cold of the streets and the cheery atmosphere of this room, my old body could not hesitate long in choosing.

AUREA

I did not think that you were an old man—God bless you—wandering through the streets in all this cold.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

CELLINI

Ah! Do not pity me, Señora. The cold of the street is a welcome change for me, for in the house where I reside it is often far colder than in la Plaza de Oriente; although my landlord, who is a Russian, constantly appears about the house in his shirt sleeves.

AUREA

What a sense of humor you possess to see things thus!

CELLINI

I have little cause to complain of the calling I have chosen.

AUREA

Pray put down your violin and hat and take a seat.

CELLINI

A thousand thanks, Señora.

AUREA

I have a favor to ask of you.

CELLINI

'Tis already granted.

AUREA

Without knowing what it is I ask?

CELLINI

I only beg permission to perform for you the impossible.

AUREA

You have certainly a most obliging nature.

CELLINI

It is an asset of which the passing years do not deprive me.

AUREA

Are you a foreigner?

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

CELLINI

As you like.

AUREA

As I like?

CELLINI

I do not say that out of politeness or merely for the sake of talking, but I can call myself both a native and a foreigner.

AUREA

I do not see how that can be so.

CELLINI

I am a citizen of Spain, Señora, but I was born in Italy.

AUREA

Indeed?

(Cellini, who is preparing as usual to invent a tale, gives to the following narrative a slightly jesting tone.)

CELLINI

It was in Naples that I first beheld the light of day. My mother was a tragedienne quite famous in her time—Emma Trolli was her name. My father, whose name and title were both well known in Italy, was Prince Filippo Malatesta. He and my mother loved each other madly; and I, the product of their love, made haste to join them. Preparations were already being made to celebrate their legal union with fitting pomp and show, so that the Princess of the stage might also be the Princess Malatesta, when one morning at daybreak the Prince, my father, was found murdered beneath the famous Bridge of Sighs in Venice.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

AUREA

Oh!—

CELLINI

His head, barbarously mutilated, was discovered in a gondola, and his body floating in a pool of blood in a canal.

AUREA

How horrible!

CELLINI

It was doubtless the vengeance of my father's family. They despised the celebrated actress. My mother lost her reason and soon I found myself in the most abject poverty and want. But there was always a sense of harmony and music in me. A noble lord, into whose service I had entered, gave me, one Twelfth Night eve, a violin, and from that time I have made my livelihood, thanks to that violin, which is now my constant comrade and the echo of my soul. When I weep, it weeps; when I laugh, it laughs, too. I bear my mother's name—Trolli, Ermete Trolli—at your service, Señora, I assure you.

AUREA

Oh, Señor Trolli. Your tale has certainly a tragic tone. Now for the favor which I have to ask you,—for I do not desire to detain you here too long.

CELLINI

Command me freely, Señora. I owe especial gratitude to this great house, for every night as I pass by, a generous gift awaits me here.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

AUREA

Well, the favor I have to ask concerns that gift. It is the offering of a little child.

CELLINI

A child?

AUREA

Yes, one of my grandchildren. I have four.

CELLINI

You have four grandchildren, Señora?

AUREA

Yes, four.

CELLINI

And I have seven. If I had suspected that the offering from this house came from a child, you can well believe that I would have guarded jealously all the money which I received from him.

AUREA

Why?

CELLINI

There is nothing purer or more touching in all the world than the spontaneous offering of a child.

AUREA

'Tis true, but you have very fine perceptions, sir.

CELLINI

Oh—no!

AUREA

Well, this little grandson of mine, who will be the death of me if he keeps up his capricious ways, is so lively and so full of whims that we are all alarmed about him.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

CELLINI

You are alarmed?

AUREA

He is a child of fancies.

CELLINI

Do not worry, then. This wealth of fancies may prove a heritage from heaven.

AUREA

God grant that it be so. But to my story. You must know that this little fellow has an idea that he cannot go to sleep until you pass by. From the very first night he heard you play, he has been so.

CELLINI

Indeed?

AUREA

Yes. He frets and becomes restless when you are late. He begins to talk such nonsense and tell such tales that he really frightens us. These last few nights, when you have passed by later than your wont, neither our caresses nor our threats could silence him nor make him sleep. And if, at last, exhausted, sleep claimed him for an instant, he would talk of you, and he would waken asking if we had given you his gift.

CELLINI

'Tis strange. And when I have gone by and he has heard the violin, then does he rest?

AUREA

Then does the little angel rest in sleep sweet and profound.

CELLINI

What is it that you wish of me?

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

AUREA

This,—if 'tis possible: pass by more regularly and somewhat earlier.

CELLINI

I will, indeed.

AUREA

It will not inconvenience you?

CELLINI

Not in the least. I have no other duty in the world but to pass by here as you request, touching the strings of my old violin so that the child, soothed by its simple melody as by a mother's lullaby, may sleep.

AUREA

Sir, you are kind indeed.

CELLINI

Señora, I am only a poor artist enamoured of his art; of the ideal in life; of the poetry of all things. But wheresoe'er I pass, play what I may, there is always some grumbler about, who exclaims on hearing me, "Confound that noisy fellow." Therefore it is not much to ask me to pass gladly by a window where I know a child awaits to offer me an alms, and who if I delay asks anxiously, "Why doesn't the old fiddler come?" Señora, wherever there is a flower within my reach, I always stoop to gather it.

AUREA

Just as you have said, he is now asking, "But why doesn't the violin man come?" (*Listening at the foot of the stairs.*) Yes?

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CELLINI

What is it Señora?

AUREA

'Tis the child's mother calling me. Surely he has wakened. I must leave you for a moment, but kindly await me here.

CELLINI

Certainly.

AUREA

I will return, anon—(*She goes up the stairs.*)

CELLINI

And I wait here. How tender and sympathetic she is, while I, garrulous impostor that I am, change my parentage as easily as I change my shirt. Cellini, son of the Principe Filippo Malatesta. That is certainly a miracle!

(*Silence. On the stairs Aurea leans over and talks to him in a low tone, without coming all the way down.*)

AUREA

Señor Trolli.

CELLINI

Yes, Señora.

AUREA

The child is not asleep. He is all excited and is asking continually for you. Would you be so kind—?

CELLINI

As to do what?

AUREA

To play something to make him think that you are just going by.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

CELLINI

Yes, immediately.

AUREA

Where are you going?

CELLINI

Into the street,—shall I not?

AUREA

It is not necessary, sir. Play here. The effect will be the same.

CELLINI

As you will, Señora.

AUREA

I will go and tell my daughter you are going to play. (*She goes up.*)

CELLINI (*preparing to play*)

Generous, affectionate little fellow—child of fancy—listen to the lullaby which I had played to me a thousand times when I was a little child like you. I used to fall asleep dreaming of it.

(He plays with sublime emotion, and the violin responds as never before to his mood and touch. The piece he plays is the song with which one afternoon long ago Aurea enlivened the garden of Solar de la Montaña, where Cellini came to find her. As he finishes, Aurea comes and leans over the stairway, and, descending slowly, looks at Cellini curiously and full of surprise.)

AUREA

Thanks, sir. No lovelier piece has ever been conceived, and how sublimely you played it. Your violin never sounded sweeter.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

CELLINI

Never has it had a better reason to respond. Comrade, if you have a soul, you must have trembled as I did when I played. Is the child sleeping now?

AUREA

He will be soon, and his mother is at his bedside weeping but full of gratitude. And his grandmother, too, is weeping. (*Looking fixedly at him.*)

CELLINI

Oh, famous artists of the world, you who play midst the mad plaudits of the multitude, here you see old Trolli—a mere street musician—who would not change for all your noisy triumphs this silent approbation of a sleeping child and of the mother who is weeping at his side.

AUREA

Trolli—Señor Trolli!

CELLINI

What is the child's name?

AUREA

Berto.

CELLINI

Berto?

AUREA

Yes. One of my sons was named Berto, also.

CELLINI (*looking at her in astonishment*)

Berto!

AUREA

Yes, Berto, like yourself, you great impostor!

CELLINI

What!

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AUREA

Oh, relentless years, what have you done to Aurea that Cellini should not recognize her?

CELLINI (*trembling*)

Aurea, Aurea, can it be possible?

AUREA

You see it is possible—Cellini. (*They clasp hands in silence, looking into each other's eyes deeply moved.*) Yes, it is I. It is I.

CELLINI

How could I have failed to recognize you when I first saw you?

AUREA

You did not recognize me because I am no longer she whom your eyes were wont to know.

CELLINI

Oh, how happy this meeting makes me! I had lost all hope of seeing you again. I thought that you were no longer living.

AUREA

But you are still alive, and you are older.
(*They look at one another again and burst out laughing.*)

CELLINI

Aurea!

AUREA

Cellini!

CELLINI

Do you live here, Aurea?

AUREA

Sit down.

CELLINI

Tell me with whom you live.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

AUREA

With my daughter Cecilia.

CELLINI

And you have four grandchildren?

AUREA

Four, and you have seven?

CELLINI

That is to say—

AUREA

That they are all descendants of Prince Filippo.

CELLINI

In direct descent.

(They both laugh.)

AUREA

What a great fraud you have always been, Cellini!

CELLINI

Tell me, Aurea, does the Count of Miraluz still live?

AUREA

My husband? No, he died some fifteen years ago.

CELLINI

I should have killed him some thirty years ago; but on the whole he came off fairly well.

AUREA

A truce to that, Cellini!

CELLINI

Fifteen years. That was long enough for him.

AUREA

Respect the dead, Cellini. For my part, I have

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consecrated so many prayers to him that I believe his soul is saved.

CELLINI

Your heart is indeed a well of tenderness. But what a joy to know your husband is in heaven.

AUREA

But why a joy to you?

CELLINI

For I will never have to meet him now.

AUREA

Certainly you will not get to heaven because of your unruly tongue and your contrary ways. (*They laugh again.*) How do you happen to have adopted this rôle of strolling musician?

CELLINI

I have not yet adopted it. There are many things still left for me to try in this great world.

AUREA

Then don't delay, Berto!

CELLINI

It matters not whether I actually accomplish them all. A poor musician who lived in the same house with me and who owed me many favors bequeathed me when he died all his possessions, which consisted of this violin and a threadbare coat that dated from his palmy days. My father had taught me as a child to play the violin. Now, as an old man, it seemed as if fate had again brought back a faithful friend of childhood to recall those happy days to me, and we wander affectionately together through the streets, gathering what is given us.

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AUREA

Do you gather much?

CELLINI

Enough. Music, although it is produced by such as I, softens the heart. Then I go home and change my rôle, for in a humbler quarter than this one, I dispense the money which I gather here. Here, I am the poor old man who plays the violin, but there I am Lord Bountiful; what I take here, as alms I scatter there.

AUREA

Ah, that is the life, Cellini. We can give only what we have. As you share the money which you gather here, so do we all. What we receive at birth, that we give out our whole life long. He who is born with tenderness sheds tenderness; with bitterness, sheds bitterness. I say that out of pity for those who have been unkind. Do you understand?

CELLINI

Yes, I understand. Another prayer offered for your husband's soul!

AUREA

How distinctly all these things reveal themselves as the snow begins to powder our wiser heads.

CELLINI

Do you recall the stormy scene at Jasmine Cottage near Seville?

AUREA

Can I forget it, Cellini? Can either one of us forget what has passed between us? No. It has been so little and so much. And still what now remains in you of that great passion?

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of that blind love of mine for him who was so little worthy of it? Mere memory now, a dying ember whose last faint glow shines from our hearts and which, ere long, the chill of winter will extinguish.

CELLINI

Have you ever again visited that spot at Solar de la Montaña by the stream?

AUREA

Oh, Cellini, I must tell you. Since that afternoon I never returned until two years ago.

CELLINI

You were so long in going back?

AUREA

Yes, a whole lifetime. It seems incredible.

CELLINI

And what happened there? Tell me all.

AUREA

I went there with my grandchildren. The spot is just the same. It seemed as if heaven had preserved it so, to make the memory more vivid. I sat down on one of the same rocks where we two talked; I closed my eyes; I saw you come and heard your voice. The little stream flowing by so clear and cool sang only of youth and joy, as it did then. And the leaves of the trees whispered a song of spring. Oh, everything recalled that afternoon in May, Cellini. Intoxicated by the whole illusion, I leaned boldly o'er the water of the pool, and, oh, Cellini, what memories welled up; how distinct the song I heard from the very leaves of the trees. Then my grandchildren ran up and how they laughed to see their grandmother gazing

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into the pool. And I laughed, too, and then I wept and laughed again as now, smiling through my tears.

CELLINI

The enchantment of the past! The dry leaves on the ground looking up at the bare branches where among the leaves the birds' nests used to swing. That is what you and I are doing now, Aurea.

AUREA

Cellini, Cellini. If life is but a dream, our lives have been more dream-like than most others.

CELLINI

Quite true.

AUREA

Will you return tomorrow with your violin?

CELLINI

Tomorrow and as long as the child needs me. Is his name really Berto?

AUREA

His name is Berto, like my son's and yours. I believe it is the only infidelity of which I have been guilty in all my life.

CELLINI

Your soul will not be lost because of that. Goodbye until tomorrow.

AUREA

Goodbye. The first time we said goodbye forever; in Seville we said goodbye till chance should bid us meet again; and now we say goodbye until tomorrow.

CELLINI

Until tomorrow, then. But since the very

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first you have always been the poetry of my life and I of yours.

AUREA

Yes, the poetry of my life.

CELLINI

The poetry of my life—the fragrance of the rose which blooms in every heart. Sometimes it is a living flower which, when we gather it, perfumes the corner where we dwell. Sometimes 'tis but a nodding flower of the imagination which blossoms just beyond our grasp and which as we approach eludes us and fades away.

AUREA

Such was the nature of our love.

CELLINI

Such it has proved. Each life can tell two different tales. The thread of one trails on the ground and of the other weaves a starlike web which shines before our eyes. Happy are those who can succeed in joining the two ends if only for a moment, for thus alone can it be said they have known happiness. Until tomorrow, then.

AUREA

Until tomorrow. Farewell, blind youth of Solar de la Montaña. Farewell, Duque de Él. Farewell, strolling musician.

CELLINI

Farewell, poetry of my life. Until tomorrow, Aurea. (*He goes out.*)

AUREA

The Poetry of Life—the Fragrance of the Rose. 'Tis so. That has ever been my happiness and

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my sole consolation in my silent sorrow. What else could have cast the golden ray of peace into the heart of a sleeping child. (*She hears Cellini playing his violin outside. He is playing again the song of the garden long ago.*) Oh, Cellini. Again the song of that afternoon so long ago.

(*Cellini passes through the garden, looking at Aurea while he plays, and disappears still playing. When he reaches the last stanza, the playing ceases. Then Aurea, in a voice filled with tears, completes the melody thus:*)

AUREA (*singing*)

“For the child a promise,
For the lass a love,
For the man a benediction,
For those beyond a rose.”

End of the Third Act

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